

Washington, DC, New Leaders for New Schools (New Leaders)



New Leaders for New Schools designed the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) to identify and provide incentives to school leaders and practitioners who have implemented effective practices that help drive student achievement gains and are willing to share those practices with educators across the country. New Leaders is working with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), with the Together Everyone Achieves More (TEAM) program, to identify which DCPS schools have the highest student achievement gains. Through EPIC, effective education practices will be identified and documented on an online knowledge system that will be accessible to all DCPS educators, all schools in the EPIC grants, and eventually to all educators nationwide.

Needs Assessment Results and General Information

In DCPS, over half of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. On the 2005 NAEP, only 11 percent of fourth-grade students scored proficient in reading, and only 9 percent scored proficient in mathematics. Secondary students scored similarly, with only 12 percent scoring proficient in reading, and 7 percent scoring proficient in mathematics. In 2007, the DC Council approved placing DCPS under mayoral control.

During the 2007-2008 school year, Chancellor Rhee offered early retirement packages to teachers and closed 23 schools for the 2008-2009 school year. Although DCPS schools have made significant gains on the state assessment test (DC-CAS), less than half of the students reached proficiency levels in both reading and math on the 2008 tests. The graduation rate has increased slightly from 66.2 percent in 2006 to 67.9 percent in 2007.

Background

Like other award models, the EPIC model of differentiated compensation recognizes the paramount importance of student achievement performance in evaluating educators. What makes EPIC unique, however, is that awards are provided to educators in exchange for sharing their effective practices with other educators in their school, district, and nationwide. EPIC provides the leadership opportunity for awarded educators to make available to their colleagues those practices that contributed to the achievement gains made by their students. EPIC's Effective Practice Teams visit award-recognized schools to identify practices for documentation and sharing based on protocols developed with New Leaders and DCPS. Such practices cover a broad spectrum of topics and may include curricular and instructional strategies, allocation of resources within a school, and professional development approaches. Through this practice-sharing focus, EPIC aspires to improve student achievement both in their

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partner districts and charter schools and in other districts and charter schools throughout the country by offering free access to these practices through a robust online community.

Under the leadership of Chancellor Rhee, DCPS is examining and revising the district's human capital and professional development strategies. She is also proposing to incorporate EPIC as a key strategy to retain and attract high-performing educators and serve as a key resource for the professional development of the broader DCPS community. To that end, the program was officially recast as the EPIC/TEAM program (Together Everyone Achieves More).

Incentives

For the first two cohorts of awarded schools, the program required 20 percent or higher gains in student proficiency rates in both reading and math as the criteria for receiving an EPIC/TEAM award. During Year 3 of the grant, a value-added model (VAM) has been developed to identify which schools are driving student academic growth as measured on the state required assessment, the DC-CAS, for future cohorts. All teachers in these schools receive \$8,000, and principals and assistant principals in these schools receive awards of \$10,000 and \$9,000, respectively. As with all EPIC programs, school leaders and teachers identified for awards work with New Leaders to document and share effective practices for inclusion in the EPIC Knowledge System. The TEAM program also provides awards to non-TIF-eligible staff in EPIC-recognized schools because one of the goals of TEAM is to acknowledge that every staff person contributes to student success.

Resources

TIF grant funding was awarded at a level of 43 percent of the projected program costs, including performance/practice incentives. In addition to the TIF grant funds, New Leaders and DCPS will match \$3.3 million total. New Leaders has secured \$9.5 million in private support for the EPIC program nationally and is working to raise additional funds to support operational efforts.

Data Systems

Student information, including grades and standardized test scores, resides on DC STARS (Student Tracking and Reporting System). In addition, a new school-level database, Schools DataLink, was launched in early September 2008. The state education agency, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, is coordinating the efforts for the SLED (statewide longitudinal education data warehouse) in which DCPS student-level data will also reside. DCPS is also launching a new special education data system, Easy IEP. DC STARS and the two new systems (DataLink and Easy IEP) will include new dashboards that will allow central office, schools, and even parents to access important school and student data.

Year 3 Activities

In the first three years of the EPIC grant, New Leaders and DCPS have awarded two cohorts of winning schools, which included over 250 educators from nine schools receiving over \$1.5 million. The program set high thresholds of gains in proficiency as the criteria for receiving an EPIC/TEAM award for the first two cohorts of winning schools, requiring an increase in the percentage of their students who are proficient in both reading and in math by 20 percentage points. For the third cohort of award schools, New Leaders partnered with DCPS and Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) in Year 3 to develop a VAM that will integrate with the more comprehensive evaluation program that the district has planned.

After launching the EPIC Knowledge System at the end of Year 2, New Leaders has populated the system with seven professional development modules based on the effective practices from the first two cohorts of DCPS award-recognized schools and another 87 modules from other partner districts and charter schools across the country. During Year 3, New Leaders laid the groundwork to begin integrating EPIC professional development modules into DCPS and New Leaders leadership trainings for both the

entire DCPS community of school leaders and the subset of that community who are New Leaders principals and assistant principals. Case studies and practice profiles from the Knowledge System were used in New Leaders' national and local trainings for the organization's leadership development program, which prepares high-quality educators to lead high-need urban schools.

Additionally, New Leaders has continued to evaluate their processes and activities formally by conducting (1) a survey of DCPS teachers to gain baseline data of their awareness and understanding of the EPIC/TEAM program and (2) a first-stage process evaluation done by a third-party independent firm to document effective practice process and the content and use of the EPIC Knowledge System.

Outlook for Year 4

During Year 3, DCPS and New Leaders moved forward with a planned, critical change in the EPIC/TEAM program design by changing to a VAM for the identification of award-winning schools. Importantly, the VAM developed for the TEAM schoolwide awards will also be used as part of the District's broader evaluation system that DCPS Chancellor Rhee introduced at the beginning of SY2009-2010. New Leaders will be providing support to DCPS as they launch a series of training programs for principals and teachers to build their understanding of value-added analysis and how it is used to identify levels of student academic growth rather than simply academic gains.

In order to strengthen the district's leadership capacity, DCPS is implementing a series of trainings for Assistant Principals using the EPIC Knowledge System professional development modules as the focal content. New Leaders is designing the sessions in conjunction with the district and plans to use this as an opportunity to document the impact of the Knowledge System content on the participants' leadership skills and effectiveness. New Leaders will continue to identify and document effective practices from this coming year's award winning schools to increase the depth of content available to educators on the EPIC Knowledge System.

New Leaders will also continue to measure the impact of the EPIC/TEAM program as an incentive for school leaders and teachers by conducting surveys of DCPS staff in the spring of 2010.